

THE MODEL CITIES PROGRAM - - - PROMISE OR THREAT?

Remarks by

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in response to address under above title by Dr. Frank S. Horne at Eastern Regional Conference on "Model Cities and Metropolitan Desegregation" sponsored by National Committee Against Discrimination in Housing, April 13-14, 1967, in New York City.



My involvement with either open housing legislation or model cities programs has been largely peripheral and there are scores of persons in New Jersey far better informed to give detailed reports on these efforts in our State. I suspect that Jack Wood, your Associate Executive Director, asked me to appear on your program because he knows that I have been deeply troubled by increasing evidence that the Model Cities Program might have an unforeseen and undesired effect upon the effort to open wider the gates through which Negroes enter the mainstream of American life. In this respect, I voice a personal view and cannot speak for either the Regional Plan Association, on whose staff I serve, nor the planning profession, organized in the American Institute of Planners, though both RPA and AIP are deeply concerned with the issues that have brought us here today. I had occasion to discuss these issues with Dr. Malcolm Talbott, president of the New Jersey Committee Against Discrimination in Housing, and he shares many of my concerns.

New Jersey has stood for some years now in the forefront among the states in legislation prohibiting discrimination in the sale or rental of housing. After a hard fight, in which an impressive support was mobilized, ably organized by Arnold Harris, then executive head of the state committee, we succeeded in amending the law a year ago to include single-family houses. Many of our good people misinterpreted this victory as winning the war. They are now chagrined to realize that no great change has ensued. The silent, unseen barrier to open occupancy remains frustratingly effective. Those who worked so hard to secure the legislation are now in a mood of doubt and confusion as they seek new answers. It is exactly this mood, so vulnerable to disorientation and loss of values, that makes the Model Cities Program a threat.



Model Cities, as it emerges in practice, offers what appears to be an attractive alternative to the need to break down barriers in all-white neighborhoods. It stresses bettering the standard of living of the poor through social and physical improvement of their environment. It concentrates on a specific area and concerns itself with the present residents. What it says, in effect, is that the Negro need not move to find a home in a good neighborhood since Model Cities will change his neighborhood into a good one. (I note with interest that HUD now refers to the program as Model Neighborhoods.) It holds forth the prospect of population stability and the hope of identification with community. As an official in the Newark program put it: "We are seeking to stop the river of people that flow through our city."

I replied that this was not the time in American history to call a halt to the process by which all preceeding ethnic groups had moved outward as they moved upward, especially not in Newark, whose white middle class moved out during the past 20 years and left it as the first of the large cities in the nation with a non-white majority.

No one can object to the location of major state office buildings or new factories in the ghetto, nor to emphasis on improving its schools and public services, nor to replacing its tenements with new housing. However, when these programs are developed with the explanation that the ghetto is here to stay and that we should help its residents by improving their environment, we are not compromising, we are not modifying -- we are surrendering.

This is the danger of the Model Cities program's increasing emphasis upon a clearly delineated area - a "box". This is utopian, unrealistic, reactionary. It runs counter to the dynamism of urban life and urban physical forms.



It invokes the stability of confinement. It is not in the spirit of freedom of choice, that highest achievement of urban society and its most attractive aspect. Its end product, at best, can only be the gilded ghetto.

Nor does it affect the rapid growth of the ghetto population, which expands its boundaries relentlessly and threatens to swallow the city. To stop the ghetto's growth, not to speak of reducing it, would require a ten-fold increase in the present rate of outward movement.

This threat is increased by another factor which we can no longer separate from a discussion of open occupancy: the growing shortage of housing. In 1964 there were 46,404 new dwelling units built in New Jersey's nine northeastern counties, which comprise a metropolitan concentration of over 5 million people. In 1966 the number was down to 28,202. This is in keeping with the national decline in housing starts. The reason for the drastic drop in new housing is the tight money situation. "Apartment starts were slashed so severely in the last half of 1966 that it will be late this year, at best, before a new crop of units can be brought to market," writes HOUSE & HOME. The same publication notes, however, that "Rental housing isn't filling as rapidly as housing economists have been expecting ... The new figures puzzle economists, who had expected the 22% slowdown in apartment building...to spur rentals."

They should not be puzzled. A glance at the average monthly rental per room for new construction in 1965 as reported by New Jersey's Bureau of Housing provides the answer: \$44.99 per room in Bergen County; \$47.83 in Essex; \$42.67 in Hudson; \$41.70 in Passaic, etc. These are FHA room counts and provide room credits for floor area that you or I would never call a room; foyers, balconies, etc. A true room count would show higher per room rentals. Such rates are just simply out-of-line with the income of the bulk of families actively seeking housing.



Who are these families primarily? This brings another crucial factor into consideration of our subject: age configuration of the population. We are all aware of the wave of post-war babies, beginning with 1946 births, which created a school shortage crisis in the 1950's and a college crisis in the 1960's. Those born in 1946 are 21 years old this year. There are about one-third more of them than those born in previous years. But each year's crop that follows them is even larger. These will be the young families of the next decade. Where will they live?

Rational planning of housing would have increased the housing supply in preparation for the stepped-up rate of family formation; instead, we are in a period of drastic cut-backs in new housing starts. The result will be the most critical housing shortage since the immediate post-World War II days, if not since the emergency of 1919-21.

A housing shortage will compound the difficulties of breaking down barriers to non-white occupancy. The desperation of young Negro families in search of housing will in turn, fortify the argument for rebuilding the ghettos at higher densities. The renewal envelope being prepared by Model Cities planning in the next few years is likely to have poured into it new ghetto housing at densities far higher than anyone would propose today. Model Cities concepts of rebuilding within a "box", combined with a desperate housing shortage are likely to create anew a sub-culture environment for generations of Negroes yet unborn.

The National Committee against Discrimination in Housing has carried the fight to illegalize discriminatory practices to heights no one would have predicted a short dozen years ago. There is still much to be done in the field of legislation. But I suggest that we are also coming to dead-end; that the inadequacies of legislative solutions become increasingly apparent; that a new



strategy is urgently needed.

I submit that this strategy must be built around the need for an adequate supply of housing of all types and for all income levels. The National Committee should consider initiating a broad alliance of national organizations interested in making a break-through to a new housing construction program. The strategy might include a National Housing Crisis Conference in Washington early in 1968 to confront Congress with the impending housing crisis and with a program to avert it. Permit me to say, in conclusion, that a housing program for the 1970's cannot be considered to be adequate in a quantitative sense alone; it must also be adequate qualitatively. It must certainly be more than the emergency shelter concept that dominated construction in the late 1940's and 1950's. In addition to architectural excellence, adequacy must include location. I am glad that the theme of this conference refers to "metropolitan" desegregation. An adequate housing program must be metropolitan in its conception and relate to employment locations and transportation; this is a function of regional planning. It must, above all, relate to the rational use of urban space, both within the city through renewal and outside of the city through public intervention in land development. Unless conceived within a regional framework, housing programs inevitably lead back to the same confining "box", where the Model Cities Program seems destined.